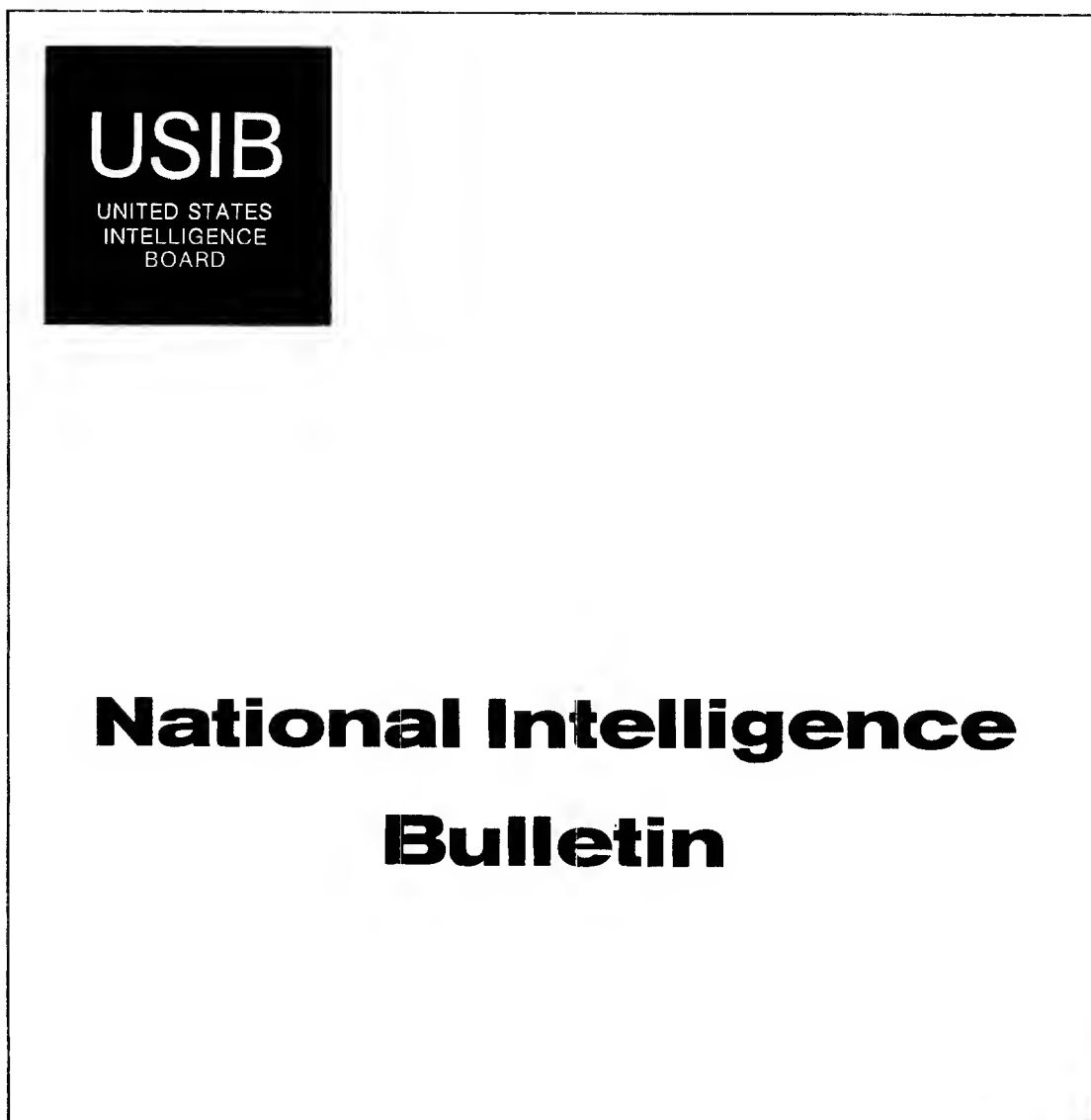


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January 16, 1976

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Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79T00975A028500010026-7

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79T00975A028500010026-7

National Intelligence Bulletin

January 16, 1976

CONTENTS

LEBANON: Christians increase pressure
against Palestinian refugee camps 1

SPAIN: Opposition coalitions to join
antigovernment demonstration 3

[Redacted]

25X1

CUBA: Castro admits Cuban
involvement in Angola 6

ARGENTINA: Cabinet
shake-up 7

FRANCE: French to develop
reconnaissance satellite 8

[Redacted]

25X1

YUGOSLAVIA: Tito is ill;
postpones Latin American trip 11

[Redacted]

25X1

Palestinian Refugee Camps



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National Intelligence Bulletin

January 16, 1976

LEBANON

Christian Phalangists yesterday launched a drive aimed at taking over Tall Zatar and Jisar al-Basha, the Palestinian refugee camps in eastern Beirut that have been blockaded by Christian militiamen since January 4.

The Phalangists' strategy apparently is to insert a column of their own men between the two camps so they can be captured one at a time. [REDACTED]

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The Christians have been increasing their pressure all week. On Tuesday, they took over the Palestinians' Dibayah refugee camp. Although the Palestinians claim the camp had little military importance, its loss was at least a psychological setback for them. In retaliation, the Palestinians have surrounded the predominantly Christian villages of Damour and Jiyah, south of Beirut.

In downtown Beirut, combined Palestinian and leftist forces have had some success in cutting supply lines to Christians holed up in the Holiday Inn. Fighting in that area is concentrated along the waterfront from the hotel district to the port. The port area has been badly damaged by fire and heavy bombardment during the recent fighting.

Fighting in the capital has paralyzed the distribution of essential goods. There are already serious shortages of food in some areas, and according to some estimates the shortages will spread throughout the city in another week. Beirut airport is still open, but British Airways has suspended operations. Several other major international airlines have delayed plans to resume flights.

25X1

National Intelligence Bulletin

January 16, 1976

The severity of the fighting has prompted yet another call from Arab League Secretary General Riyad for Arab action and a request to the League from North Yemen for Arab military intervention. Members of the League, however, are not likely to consider convening a summit until after President Franjiyah meets with President Asad in Damascus this weekend to discuss Syria's peace proposals.

25X1

National Intelligence Bulletin

January 16, 1976

SPAIN

The two coalitions of Spanish opposition parties, in a move to exploit the current wave of labor unrest, have pledged to join strikers in a mass demonstration against the government next Tuesday.

A joint communique issued on Wednesday by the Communist-dominated Democratic Junta and the Socialist-led Platform of Democratic Convergence supported the strikers and blamed labor unrest in Spain on the government's failure to initiate meaningful reforms. A representative of the clandestine, Communist-manipulated workers' commissions told the press that labor would not cooperate with King Juan Carlos' government unless it ends wage controls, releases imprisoned strike leaders, and permits free trade unions.

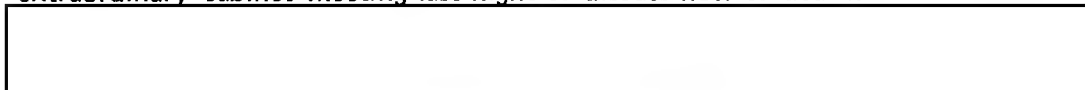
The planned demonstration next Tuesday will be the first case of joint action by the two leftist coalitions, although several joint statements have been issued during the past few months. Both the Junta and the Platform publicly espouse the cooperation of all forces of the left, but they have been unable to reach agreement on a merger. The Spanish press, however, has recently been quoting "well-informed political sources" who claim a merger is imminent.

After a meeting in Paris last week, a Junta spokesman announced that his organization had approved a merger with the Socialist coalition and that a commission had been set up to complete negotiations leading to unification. Two days later, however, leaders of the Platform issued a statement reiterating their earlier reservations about joining forces with the Junta.

Socialist leaders, fearing the Platform would be swallowed or dominated by the Junta, are holding out for equal representation on the governing body of any joint organization. The Junta is insisting on proportional representation, which would allow it to benefit from its numerical superiority.

Closer ties between the two coalitions seem to be in the offing, but many of the smaller groups in the Platform remain distrustful of the Communists and will probably oppose a full merger even if their conditions are met.

The government's determination not to let essential public services be paralyzed was further tested yesterday by a partial strike of telephone and bank workers. According to the press, King Juan Carlos is reluctant to use military conscription—as he did against postal workers—as a strike-breaking tactic against workers in fields that are not wholly state-owned. Prime Minister Arias called an extraordinary cabinet meeting last night to discuss how to deal with the situation.



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Next 1 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79T00975A028500010026-7

National Intelligence Bulletin

January 16, 1976

CUBA

Prime Minister Fidel Castro's lackluster defense of Cuba's military role in Angola suggests he is uncomfortable with what has proved to be an unpopular and costly policy.

Speaking before foreign journalists in Havana yesterday, he acknowledged directly for the first time the presence of "Cuban soldiers" in Angola and apparently made no attempt to cloak official sponsorship by claiming that they were volunteers. He also admitted that his troops had suffered casualties, but he would not elaborate.

As other official spokesmen have done, Castro described Cuba's involvement as a reaction to South Africa's intervention. He said that Cuba is in Angola fighting alongside revolutionaries who are combating the US and South Africa. He claimed that no Cuban military units had gone to Angola prior to the South African "invasion" on October 23; in fact, 1,500 or more Cuban military personnel had arrived prior to that date.

Although only an incomplete text of Castro's remarks is available so far, it is clear that he views an improvement in relations with the US as impossible under present circumstances. He claimed that Cuba is "in favor of peace, the policy of detente, and coexistence between states with different social systems," but he insisted that Cuba would not be diverted from support of the Puerto Rican independence movement or the Popular Movement in Angola as the price for improved US ties. He reiterated his oft-stated, uncompromising demand that "for negotiations with us, the economic blockade must be unconditionally lifted."

Castro's use of a press conference rather than a speech to get his message across is significant; he uses this technique to keep from the Cuban people those matters he believes must be addressed in the international sphere but are too sensitive for domestic consumption. His caution on this occasion tends to confirm already substantial reporting that the Angolan war and Cuba's role in it are unpopular subjects among the population.

25X1

National Intelligence Bulletin

January 16, 1976

ARGENTINA

President Peron's latest cabinet shake-up adds a new factor of instability to Argentina's political scene. Her appointment of two politically inexperienced men to the sensitive cabinet posts of interior and justice and her failure to fill top positions in the foreign and defense ministries have left the government even weaker than before.

Angel Robledo, who as interior minister sought to conciliate growing political and military opposition to the government, was the principal victim of the shake-up. He was increasingly at odds with Peron because of his efforts to persuade her to take another extended leave of absence or to resign.

Robledo's successor, Roberto Ares, will be the sixth to have served the present government in this position. Ares, a respected economist whose previous post was head of the national bank, has little political experience. He is reported, however, to have ties with Peronist labor.

The new minister of justice, Jose Deheza, has apparently been elevated to the cabinet because of his recent success in getting corruption charges against Peron dropped for lack of evidence. Peron's decision to remove those advisers who had recently urged her to step down is being widely interpreted in Buenos Aires as an act of defiance.

The impediments to military action against the President continue to diminish, but one major constraint—the potentially disruptive role of Peronist labor—remains.

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National Intelligence Bulletin

January 16, 1976

FRANCE

The French reportedly are planning to finance the development of a reconnaissance satellite.



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There have been reports for several years that some members of the French government and scientific community have been interested in producing a reconnaissance satellite for military or research purposes. The production of such a satellite, however, has had a low priority in the government-sponsored research program. Paris may have decided that there is now sufficient military value in such a satellite to justify funding. Another factor may be that the French have recently made progress in developing a launch vehicle capable of orbiting the satellite.



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National Intelligence Bulletin

January 16, 1976

YUGOSLAVIA

President Tito is ill and has been forced to postpone his trip to Mexico and Cuba that had been scheduled to begin on January 28.

Belgrade's announcement on Wednesday said the 83-year-old President is recuperating from a cold and another bout with sciatica. The announcement is intended to counter the inevitable rumors that Tito is dying.

Similar ailments last May forced Tito to rest for nearly a month. While Tito recuperates, Stane Dolanc, head of the party executive committee, and Vladimir Bakaric, vice president of the state collective presidency, will fill his official posts.



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